
Feature Story

U.S. Department of Education Establishes New Center and Task Force to Meet the Needs of Rural Students and Teachers



Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) Beto Gonzalez (upper left) and (left to right) Chief of Staff Jana Toner, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Henry Johnson, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Safe and Drug-free Schools Deborah Price and (lower left) Stacy Kreppel of the Office of Innovation and Improvement, attend a task force meeting.

Photo by Paul Wood, OCO

The Department of Education has developed a Center for Rural Education and reorganized the Secretary's Rural Education Task Force, which together will address challenges facing rural schools.

Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) Beto Gonzalez chairs the task force and former U.S. Commissioner of Education William "Bill" L. Smith is the director of the Center for Rural Education. The task force works with the center to promote excellence in rural education through *NCLB*. Both housed in OVAE, the two also provide information resources for policymakers at the local, state and federal level.

"Every child, no matter where his or her school is located, deserves the benefit of a quality education as promised under No Child Left Behind," Secretary Spellings said. "This new center will help address the needs of our students, educators and parents in rural America and ensure they are getting the necessary resources and support to succeed."

Designed to provide a unified approach to rural education, the mission of the center is to disseminate information about research and promising practices on a wide range of topics, while also working to bring renewed attention to the unique problems and issues facing students in rural schools.

A primary goal of the center is to update *The Condition of Education in Rural Schools*, a report last released by the Department in 1994. ED estimates that nearly 42 percent of the nation's public schools are in rural communities or small towns. "The updated report will provide new information about rural schools to help us address their needs," Smith said.



William "Bill" L. Smith is the director of the Center for Rural Education

Photo by Leslie Williams, OCO

The task force is currently inventorying all Department resources, looking at everything from grants to scholarship opportunities that help schools and students in rural areas. By gathering the information and putting it in one place, rural schools will have one place to go to find the resources to fit their needs. The results of the inventory will be posted on the Department's Web site.



(left to right) Assistant Secretary Henry Johnson, Assistant Deputy Secretary Deborah Price and Director Bill Smith during a task force meeting.

Photo by Paul Wood, OCO

The center has also hosted a series of focus groups and forums to highlight issues facing rural education. On Jan. 20 of this year, 17 teachers from rural schools in 13 states converged on the nation's capital to discuss issues facing rural teachers and also shared promising practices that they use in their classrooms.

The morning session of the daylong focus group prompted discussions on the teaching profession—how teachers can balance work and life; the unique challenges of teaching in rural, often isolated locations; and professional development. The afternoon's discussion centered on students in the rural classroom and how to motivate them, strengthening parent-teacher relationships at all grade levels and preparing rural students for involvement in a global workforce.

The teachers shared examples of “promising practices” that they use in their classrooms to help students improve and to help close the achievement gap. Several agreed to be videotaped to share this information with other rural teachers. Highlights will be available on the Center for Rural Education’s Web site in the near future.

To learn more about the Center for Rural Education and the Secretary’s Rural Education Task Force, visit www.ed.gov/nclb/freedom/local/rural/index.html

—Elaine Quesinberry, OCO

The task force members and staff are listed below.

The members of the Rural Education Task Force include:

Office of Vocational and Adult Education - Beto Gonzalez
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education - Henry Johnson
Office of Postsecondary Education - Linda Emery
Federal Student Aid - Calvin Thomas
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services - Donna Wiesner
Office of Communications and Outreach - Elaine Quesinberry
Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development - Krista Ritacco
Office of English Language Acquisition - Trinidad Torres-Carrion
Institute of Education Sciences - Mark Schneider
Office of Innovation and Improvement - Stacy Kreppel
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools - Deborah Price
Office of the General Counsel - Dennis Koeppel
Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs - Sandra Cook

Staff:

Task Force Executive Director - Linda Hall
OVAE - Chief of Staff Jana Toner and Richard LaPointe
Center for Rural Education - William Smith, Lincairn Preston, Cassandria Blair
Institute of Education Sciences - Ram Singh